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Commission on Sustainable Development acting as the preparatory committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development
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Item 2 of the provisional agenda*
Consideration of the revised Chairman's paper transmitted from the third session of the Commission acting as the preparatory committee, together with other relevant inputs to the preparatory process

Letter dated 18 March 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Niger to the United Nations addressed to the Chairman of the Commission acting as the preparatory committee

On instructions from my Government, I wish to inform you that the Niger has just hosted in Agadez, from 25 to 28 February 2002, the second meeting of the Panel of Eminent Personalities to consider the Poverty-Environment Nexus in the context of the timely and effective implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

The Panel has completed its work a few months prior to the holding in Johannesburg of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Its members made recommendations with regard to the Summit and launched an appeal entitled the "Agadez Call", in which the international community is called on to support sustained cooperation with developing countries that are affected by desertification. The report of the Panel and the Agadez Call are annexed hereto (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex issued as a document of the Summit and of its preparatory process.

(*Signed*) Ousmane **Moutari**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

* A/CONF.199/PC/15.

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Annex to the letter dated 18 March 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Niger to the United Nations addressed to the Chairman of the Commission acting as the preparatory committee

The UNCCD: A Useful Tool for Sustainable Development and Poverty Alleviation

Report of the Panel of Eminent Personalities

In April 2001, the Under-Secretary General of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) convened a Panel of Eminent Personalities to consider the Poverty – Environment Nexus in the context of timely and effective implementation of the UNCCD.

The Panel started its deliberations in October 2001 and reached the conclusions at its meeting in Agadez from 25 to 28 February 2002, enclosed in the attached brief report.

I. Meeting the Challenges of Global Poverty and Sustainable Development at WSSD

The Brundtland Commission report, fifteen years ago, crystallized the linkages between poverty and environmental degradation in the concept of **sustainable development**. The Rio Summit strongly endorsed this concept in 1992 and called for sustainable development to become the *modus vivendi* of the international community. Ten years later, as the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) takes place in Johannesburg, environment, development and poverty eradication are once again central themes of discussions.

Poverty eradication and environmental policies could advance together. There are many poverties and many pollutions. The priority is to cooperate for the sustainable development of the communities who live in absolute poverty or suffer from extreme hunger. These are often rural communities in dryland areas.

Given limited financial and technical resources, the purpose of this document is to demonstrate that ***the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa*** (UNCCD) is one of the key instruments to deal with these issues because it is focused on areas of extreme poverty and social instability, and is a tool for development, environmental protection, and the prevention of forced migratory movements.

Land Degradation and Poverty

Desertification – i.e. land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas resulting from climatic variations and human activities – is a truly global phenomenon. It is affecting 3,6 billion hectares worldwide, an area equivalent to one quarter of the Earth's land mass. Desertification affects 70% of all drylands on this planet in more than 100 countries. 24 billion tons of topsoil are estimated to be lost every year as a result of this phenomenon, with serious impact on agricultural production.

Thirty-eight percent of the world's population – 2,3 billion people – live in dryland areas. It is estimated that the livelihood of 250 million people is directly affected by desertification, while another billion living in rural drylands is threatened by this phenomenon. While desertification is a universal phenomenon affecting every continent, it is most acute in Africa where the combination of extreme poverty and severity of land degradation is creating a dramatic situation. Almost three quarters of Africa's drylands – a third of Africa's land mass – are moderately to extremely degraded. Nearly half of Africa's population – or 325 million people – is threatened by desertification, and millions are already affected in dryland communities where basic subsistence is a daily challenge.

While there are few accurate statistics on poverty in the drylands, evidence shows a clear correlation between land degradation and high levels of impoverishment. There is a complex cause-effect relationship between desertification, population growth and poverty that is best illustrated as a poverty/land degradation downward spiral, whereby growing and impoverished populations overexploit their already stressed land resources, thereby further degrading a shrinking resource base and exacerbating poverty. In that cycle, poverty is both a cause and a consequence of land degradation, and the poor are both agents and victims of the process.

II. The UNCCD as a Useful Tool for Achieving Sustainable Development and Poverty Alleviation

The UNCCD was created to reverse the poverty – land degradation cycle and support the development needs of dryland communities in a sustainable way. It has very important characteristics:

1. *An Authentic Sustainable Development Focus*

The UNCCD is a strategic instrument to integrate environmental and developmental policies through its sustainable development focus.

1. A Focus on Poverty-Stricken Communities in the Drylands

The UNCCD offers a community-based, bottom-up, participatory approach designed to support local communities facing the double challenge of poverty and desertification. It establishes a remarkably useful framework to address the challenges of rural development and environmental protection in the drylands.

1. A Tool to Prevent Socio-Economic Instability and Forced Migration

The UNCCD offers advantages as an instrument that can prevent food insecurity, socio-economic disruptions and forced migrations through the sustainable development of rural communities, thus also reducing pressure on the urban communities by the rural poor. It is of concern that reduced international support for long-term development assistance has increased the need for emergency relief. The UNCCD addresses this challenge by channelling aid flows into productive long-term dryland agricultural development, and by providing a coordinated and integrative framework to support dryland communities development.

A Tool to Prevent Conflict Over Scarce Resources

The UNCCD geographical scope coincides with areas where conflict over scarce resources is prevalent. Where environmental scarcity did not degenerate into violent conflict, the critical factor in preventing resources-based conflicts was the ability of local people in resource-poor areas to intensify agricultural production, better manage their pastural areas, agree joint programmes for the sustainable management of transboundary natural resources or diversify their livelihoods without degrading the environment.

An Integrative, Participatory Instrument

The UNCCD provides a framework for a participatory – thus democratic – and integrated approach to sustainable development: the National Action Programmes (NAPs). The NAPs promote policies and strengthen institutional frameworks which develop cooperation and coordination, in a spirit of partnership, between the donor community, governments at all levels, local populations and community groups, and facilitate access by local populations to appropriate information and technology and help them control the resources in their areas.

A Multi-Layered Cooperation Instrument

The UNCCD establishes a framework for the development of national, sub-regional and regional action programmes and international cooperation that are mutually reinforcing instruments. It also has the opportunities to establish synergies or linkages with other major environmental and socio-economic treaties including UNFCCC, CBD, Ramsar as well as regional agreements such as New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

A Partnership Approach to Financial Resources

The UNCCD is an effective instrument to coordinate financial resources from multiple sources, including those of foundations, non-governmental organisations and other private sector entities, with the aim of maximizing benefits for the dryland communities. The Convention operates through partnership agreements between donors, affected countries and dryland communities.

I. An Initiative for Dryland Communities

The early implementation of the Convention shows a high level of commitment from its developing countries Parties. Nerly fifty affected countries have completed their NAPs. Affected Parties are committed to the mobilization of internal resources and the creation of an enabling environment to combat desertification. In addition to the challenges of financing, the NAPs need to be mainstreamed by affected countries in their development strategies. This means raising the profile of sustainable development strategies within governmental activities. Countries affected by desertification also realize that the mainstreaming of dryland rural development activities into national development strategies will be necessary to raise support among funding agencies. They are making every effort to do that.

Developing countries affected by desertification are well under way to meeting their obligations, but there is not yet a clear indication that their developed country partners will support those initiatives, as envisaged under the partnership agreements. In 2000, ODA reached 53,7 billion, for an average contribution from DAC countries equivalent to 0,22% of their GDP. The proportion of aid to least developed countries – many of them Sub-Saharan African countries seriously affected by desertification, – fell from 27% in 1990 to 22% in 2000. During the last decade, the Global Environmental Facility allocated $3 billion to project activities, supplemented by $8 billion in additional financing. Out of that, projects containing a strong land degradation component have been allocated about US$278 million by the GEF, US$50 million is estimated to come out of the GEF portfolio as such. The decreasing proportion of ODA allocated to agriculture and to least developed countries, combined with the limited GEF resources available to land degradation activities exacerbated the marginalization, poverty and social problems of the dryland communities affected by desertification.

This certainly needs to be seriously addressed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The following recommendations are meant to serve this purpose:

II. Recommendations to the WSSD

The WSSD may wish to:

1. Recognize the clear link between land degradation and poverty in rural dryland areas and partly in urban areas

2. Acknowledge that the UNCCD is an important tool for achieving sustainable development and alleviating poverty through combating land degradation in drylands focusing on poverty-stricken communities

3. Recommend the development and implementation of a special dryland rural areas programme that identifies integrated projects for the sustainable development of small dryland communities

4. Invite the Governments of affected developing country Parties to:

a) Establish a national enabling environment that ensures full participation of the local communities in the actions taken to combat desertification, and systematically open channels for CBOs and NGOs involvement in project elaboration and implementation as important tools for the empowerment of dryland communities
b) Integrate measures to combat desertification into their land, water and energy policies and programmes
c) Include among the priorities they put forward to the donor community for financial support action programmes to combat desertification
d) Incorporate references to the UNCCD National Action Programmes (NAPs) in the World Bank Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs)

5. Invite the donor community to:

a) Support the implementation of the national action programmes under the umbrella of the UNCCD, and the decentralised projects at the local level, by providing predictable and stable financial measures.
b) Provide financial and technological support for the development of regional action programmes to combat desertification under the umbrella of the UNCCD to improve monitoring and early warning related to desertification.
c) Increase, and better target and coordinate ODA resources for short and long term activities through the development of partnership agreements as provided for in the Convention;
d) Actively promote the systematic use of additional sources of funding, such as private foundations, fiscal incentives and alternative credit

6. Invite the GEF, at its next Assembly to:

a) Adopt land degradation as a focal area for financing by the GEF and
b) Declare the GEF as a financing mechanism for the implementation of the UNCCD

Annex: Members of the Panel of Eminent Personalities

Mr. Amin, Samir Economist, Egypt (resident of Senegal)
Mr. Bugnicourt, Jacques Executive Secretary, Environmental Development Action (ENDA), France (resident of Senegal)
Mr. Calzolaio, Valerio Former Deputy Minister of Environment, Member of the Italian Parliament, Foreign Affairs Committee, Italy
Mr. Chapman, Grant Senator, Australia
Mr. Chonchol, Jacques Economist, Former Minister, Director of the Doctorate Program in Latin American Society Studies, Universidad ARCIS, Chile
Mr. Holtz, Uwe Professor of Political Science, University of Bonn, former member of the German Parliament - Former Chair of its Development Cooperation Committee, Germany
Mr. Johnson, Pierre Marc Former Premier of Quebec, Counsel, Canada
Mr. Landim, Paes Federal Deputy, Former Professor of Law at the University of Brasilia., Brazil
Ambassador Sahnoun, Mohamed Secretary General's Special Envoy for Africa, Algeria
Ms. Savane, Marie-Angélique Sociologist, Former Director for Africa of UNFPA, Senegal
Mr. Strong, Maurice Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, Former Secretary General of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Canada
Mr. Tolba, Mostafa Former Executive Director of UNEP, President of the International Centre for Environment and Development, Egypt
Mr. Ziegler, Jean Former Member of Parliament, Professor at the University of Geneva, Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, UNCHR, Switzerland

Second Session of The Panel of Eminent Personalities on the Poverty-Environment Nexus in the context of an Effective and Timely Implementation of the UNCCD:

The Agadez Call:

We, members of the Panel of Eminent Personalities on the Poverty-Environment Nexus in the context of the Effective and Timely Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, meeting in Agadez in the Republic of Niger from February 25 to 28, 2002,

Considering the forthcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development, to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, from August 26 to September 4, 2002.

Noting that in poor countries the geography of poverty coincides with that of regions affected by drought and desertification.

Having noticed inconsistencies between the implementation of some Rio commitments, particularly to the disadvantage of the Convention to Combat Desertification, and taking into account priority given to Africa by this instrument.

Considering also the importance of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

Having deliberated and reported on the interrelationship between sustainable development, land degradation and poverty alleviation,

Convinced that desertification and poverty are intimately related phenomena, and that the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification constitutes an instrument of primary importance for poverty eradication, environmental protection and sustainable development in regions that are affected by desertification;

Having witnessed, during field trips, the state of poverty characterizing rural populations that are so gravely affected by desertification and that progress can more effectively be made through the further materialization of assistance from the international community;

1. Call on the international community to support sustained cooperation with developing countries that are affected by desertification, especially in Africa. In this regard, we call upon the most industrialized countries that will meet at the G8 Summit in Canada in June 2002 to pay particular attention to fighting desertification, and to take appropriate measures to strengthen the CCD as a primary tool for cooperation with developing affected countries;

2. Kindly invite the Prime Minister, Chief of Government of Niger to deliver this call to the World Summit on Sustainable Development and to its preparatory process; and propose that arrangements be made to include this call on the agenda of discussions between Heads of States and Governments of the G8 and those representing Africa at the June 2002 Summit in Canada.